

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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Title I Cooperative
Educational Service Unit 10

Four steps help teens discover the motivation to achieve goals

Whether your teen wants to earn a place on the honor roll, make the varsity soccer team or balance school and a part-time job, she'll need motivation to achieve her goals. Help her find it by sharing these tips:

- 1. Distinguish between goals and dreams.** Goals are dreams with deadlines. If your teen says she wants to make the soccer team but never practices, she has a dream. Only if she is taking action to make the dream a reality can it be called a goal.
- 2. Write goals down.** When her aims are listed on paper, they'll become more real to her. Have her post her goals where she will see them daily.
- 3. Visualize success.** Successful people from Albert Einstein to LeBron James have done the same thing: They've imagined themselves being successful. As your teen prepares for a test, for example, ask her to imagine herself looking at it and knowing the answers. She'll need to study, too, of course, but the vision should motivate her to hit the books again.
- 4. Experiment with task order.** For many teens, finishing an unpleasant task first makes the rest of the session more enjoyable. If your teen dislikes algebra, suggest that she get that out of the way at the beginning of a study session. On the other hand, some teens prefer to begin a study or practice session with something easy in order to build momentum. Have your teen experiment and find out what works for her.



Get a 10-minute head start

Doing a little work in advance can make homework sessions seem easier. Encourage your teen to use spare minutes to:

- **Skim the next chapter** of a textbook.
- **Solve a math problem** or two.
- **Find a source** for a paper or project.

Source: R. Dellabough, *101 Ways to Get Straight A's*, Troll Communications.

Connect to the real world

One way to support your teen's education is to reinforce what she is learning in the classroom with real-life activities. For example, if she is taking:



- **Math**, ask her to help you plan a monthly budget for the family.
- **History**, visit a museum, battlefield or monument together. If it's recent history, have her speak to someone who lived through the era she's studying.
- **A foreign language**, watch a movie in that language together. Or have your teen do the ordering in a restaurant that serves food from that culture.



Sometimes, peer pressure can be good

We often think of peer pressure in purely negative terms. But peers can also push teens in good directions, such as toward greater involvement in school. Expose your teen to positive peer pressure by encouraging activities that let him meet teens who share his interests and your values. You can:

- **Promote participation** in extracurricular school clubs or sports. Look at the school website together and try to find a club that matches your teen's interests.
- **Ask your teen to consider** joining a service club, or a youth group at your house of worship. If transportation is a problem, help your teen arrange a carpool.
- **Let him entertain friends** at home while you are there. Offer movies and a variety of snacks.
- **Seek out the parents** of your teen's friends. Talk with them about their rules and the values they share with their kids. You'll be able to check when your teen says "everyone else" is allowed to go to a midnight movie.

Learning thrives on respect

Respectful students add to a productive learning environment for themselves and their classmates. Remind your teen that teachers appreciate students who:



- **Say please**, *thank you* and *excuse me*.
- **Listen quietly** when a teacher or classmate is speaking.
- **Express their ideas** without putting others down.
- **Apologize**—and mean it—when they do something wrong.

Source: "Teaching Manners in a Manner-less World," Education World, nswc.com/classmanners.



My teen is trying hard, but still struggling. Now what?

Q: My 10th grader works hard in Spanish class. But he just isn't getting it. His grades are low, and he may have to repeat the class. What can I suggest when his best effort just isn't enough?

A: Some students can master a subject without much effort. Others work hard and still struggle. That's no reason for your teen—or you—to give up. Trying hard won't work if he's not trying the right things. Help him focus on things he might do differently that can improve his chances of success. Suggest that your teen:

- **Talk with his teacher.** He should tell the teacher how much time he spends studying every night. He can ask what problems the teacher sees, and what the teacher thinks he could do differently.
- **Devote more time each day to Spanish.** Encourage him to spend at least 20 minutes learning vocabulary words with flash cards. Later in the study session, have him work on fluency by reading aloud.
- **Review past lessons.** Have him redo homework from the beginning of the year. When he hits a stumbling block, he may be able to pinpoint where his problems started. Then he can ask the teacher to clarify.
- **Get extra help.** Would the teacher be willing to work with your teen after school? Is there a student who could tutor him?

With a strong work ethic and your support, your teen can master this challenge.



What's going on in your teen's life?

Some teens keep the details of their lives strictly to themselves. Don't let your tight-lipped teen close you out! Here's a quiz to help you open up the lines of communication. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Can you name** the kids who eat lunch with your teen?
- ___ **2. Do you listen** to your teen's music sometimes? Can you name her favorite song?
- ___ **3. Do you know** the names of your teen's teachers? Can you name her favorite teacher?
- ___ **4. Can you name** two friends your teen texts with?
- ___ **5. Do you talk** with your teen about what is going on in the world? Can you name her biggest worry?

How well are you doing?

Show this quiz to your teen and talk together about your answers. See if she can answer some similar questions about you.

“A step backward, after making a wrong turn, is a step in the right direction.”

—Kurt Vonnegut

Get your teen's thoughts

It's important to remember that the focus of education is learning, not grades. When you talk to your teen about school, don't just ask how he's doing. Show him you care about what he is thinking. Ask:

- **About the book he's reading.** Can he give you a brief summary of the plot?
- **About a recent test.** Does he think it was a good way to measure his knowledge of the material? Why or why not?
- **About his accomplishments.** How did he go about solving the toughest chemistry problem he's had recently?

Source: M. Riera, Ph.D., *Uncommon Sense for Parents with Teenagers*, Celestial Arts.

Ask about study habits

If your teen is spending hour after hour late into the night on homework that shouldn't take more than two hours, ask her:

- **When are you most alert?** Moving homework time to the afternoon may make a difference.
- **How many breaks do you take?** Experts suggest taking a short break every 30 to 60 minutes, but not so many that it interferes with concentration.

Watch for danger signs

Is your teen at risk of dropping out of school? Warning signs include:



- **Poor grades.**
- **Lack of confidence** in his abilities.
- **Limited goals** for the future.
- **Absenteeism.** Does he miss more than five days of school each term?

If you see any of these signs, talk to your teen and his counselor. Develop a plan to address issues before they lead to failure.

Source: “Why Do Students Drop Out?,” National Dropout Prevention Center/Network at Clemson University, niswc.com/dropout.

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